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To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North

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a vernacular corrective to the sterile modernism of high-style architecture. Horwitz contends convincingly that the furor of the debate disguises the underlying symbolic warfare between those who envision two different American futures, that is, those who value the chance for a commercially successful few resulting from freedom and those who value society as a whole and would regulate individuals. His prose sustains an intellectual odyssey of the highest order in these first two chapters which otherwise could have been a dreary bibliographical essay. Horwitz promises new light on the debate from his following extensive interviews of workers on the strip.

The succeeding three chapters, however, repeat a common litany of leftist complaints about the Industrial Revolution. Horwitz shows that workers are progressively alienated from the consumers on whom they depend for a living, and he insists that the dehumanizing effect of corporate capitalism's drive for ever-increasing efficiency is not just the workers' problem but deserves society's redress. Horwitz concludes in anarchistic fashion by dismissing the effectiveness of institutional reforms and asking instead for changed attitudes between individuals. He believes in the possibility of improvement if each consumer treats workers with common decency.

Horwitz's sympathies perhaps denied him the possibility of placing equal emphasis on the freedoms of the workplace that he concluded from his interviews are peculiar to the strip. One wonders if there may also be a distinct strip working-class culture such as oral history has uncovered recently among earlier twentieth-century industrial workers. Horwitz may not have taken the opportunity to draw on new trends in labor history, but his probing of major social questions is a significant departure in the emerging literature of the roadside which has concentrated almost exclusively on its visual aspects. And all of his weighty questions of conscience are raised in a very bright and very readable fashion.

ILLINOIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AGENCY KEITH A. SCULLE

To Their Own Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North, by Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman. Henry A. Wallace Series on Agricultural History and Rural Studies. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987. xi, 322 pp. Diagrams, maps, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $29.95 cloth.

To Their Own Soil is the long-awaited report by Jeremy Atack, professor of economics at the University of Illinois, and Fred Bateman, professor of business economics at Indiana University, on their study of a large

sample of farms and rural households in the northern United States, drawn from the manuscript census of 1860. About fifteen years ago the sample was extracted from the manuscript census records. It opened up the possibility of a major reinterpretation of the state of U.S. agriculture at that time. Over the years a number of particular and partial studies using these sample data have appeared. This volume, however, constitutes the main report.

This is a very important study that should be of interest to a wide readership. It is written, however, in a way that speaks primarily to scholars who are specialists in the field. The book should be quite accessible to a wider readership, although they may not so readily share the excitement of scholars and may be unfamiliar with the established controversies the authors address. The sample is of twelve thousand farms in 102 townships widely scattered over the northern states. A primary organizing principle in the presentation of the results is the contrast between the more recently settled Northwest and the longer established Northeast. Much of the evidence is presented by state, though, and there are numerous maps that show the characteristics of the 102 sample townships. The study deals not just with farming but with the broader rural community as well. The first third of the book is devoted to the rural population as a whole, both farm and nonfarm, based on the seventeen thousand households included in the sample. The second, larger part of the book deals more specifically with farming as an economic activity.

In the first part of the book the authors turn from a description of their data base to a review of the main features of the northern rural population in 1860. Perhaps the most outstanding thing they stress is the size of the rural nonfarm population. In Iowa and Kansas, for example, fewer than 50 percent of rural households were operating farms. Next, the authors turn to birth rates, a topic of current debate in the scholarly literature. Their sample evidence reconfirms a strong positive relationship between birth rates and the abundance and ease of availability of cultivable land. A chapter devoted to migration shows hardly anything surprising: there was a lot of migration westward. Perhaps the most interesting findings of part one are in a chapter on the distribution of wealth. The rural north in 1860 appears to have been remarkably egalitarian. The distribution of wealth was more nearly equal than has been found almost anywhere. Even more interesting, the distribution of wealth in the Northwest was no more egalitarian than in the Northeast.

Part two of the book has seven chapters dealing with aspects of farming itself. On the costs of farm making the authors confirm the plausibility of the widely used estimate of about one thousand dollars.

They show, however, that tenancy was a substantially cheaper alternative, and one that was widely resorted to. A chapter on livestock in the farm economy gives particular emphasis to dairying, showing it to be more nearly ubiquitous and of greater significance than has often been presumed. Most farms in the northern United States produced a saleable surplus of dairy products. In another chapter the authors develop a statistical procedure for indirectly measuring crop yields. This results in lower estimated average yields than those commonly quoted. Yields are also shown to have differed widely by soil type. A chapter on productivity points to gains from farm productivity advances that are even greater than the already dramatic figures widely in use. Elsewhere in the chapter, by contrast, the authors provide a strongly revisionist analysis of the adoption of the reaper.

From productivity the authors turn to the estimation of marketable surpluses. A succinct characterization of where their conclusions leave the issue is difficult to formulate. They find that the great majority of farms produced some saleable surplus above household needs, but those surpluses typically were not large. In the West the average farm fed about two other households, in the Northeast about one other. Then the authors turn to the aggregation of marketable surpluses and ask how much farm output was available for shipment outside the local township. Among other things, this requires them to assemble a superb collection of regional price data. Mainly, they find a strong impact of proximity to the transport system on the generation of farm output beyond the needs of local communities.

Finally, the authors turn to the bottom-line consideration—profitability. Their calculated rates of profit show wide variability—high in New York and Illinois, low in Missouri and Michigan. Northeastern farming was generally profitable; the West reveals a spottier picture. The value of their study is that they are able not just to confirm that larger farms were more profitable but to show how much profitability rose with farm size (in the West generally, for example, forty acres was the breakeven point) and at the same time what influence other factors such as soil type may have exerted.

I have dwelt at considerable length on the content of this study so as to convey a full impression of the wealth of material it contains. That leaves little space for criticisms. I shall make only two. One is that the authors do all too little in the way of evaluating the quality of the evidence they have generated. Comparisons with published census aggregates would be helpful. If there are indications of bias they should be owned up to. A sample of twelve thousand farms sounds large; but it is really only a random sample of 102 townships, and sample variance could be a problem. One cannot suppress a suspicion that Indiana

farms appear to be overrepresented and Iowa farms possibly underrepresented. A second general criticism is that more could have been done to exploit the linkage between farm and personal or household characteristics that is one of the attractive features of the sample. The study is too much confined to series of separate examinations of farms or rural households. More use could have been made of the sample to report on interactions. For example, how many of the small farms were operated by older farmers as quasi-retirement plots? Or, did farmers born and raised locally have advantages, or even just differences, in comparison with immigrants? Any criticisms aside, though, this is a major, valuable contribution to agricultural history.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, CANADA R. M. MCINNIS

The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America, edited by Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. xi, 355 pp. Notes,maps, tables, illustrations, index. $36.00 cloth, $9.95 paper.

The editors of this substantial book provide a meaty introduction and ten interesting chapters arranged under three geographical headings—"The Northeast," "The South," and "The West"—with a single essay as finale to introduce the reader to "The Countryside after the Great Transformation." The volume, Hahn and Prude inform us, is a substantive introduction to the "breadth and possibilities of the new rural history" (7). Although by no means completely repudiating Turnerian insights or older varieties of agricultural history, the editors emphasize the importance of viewing rural life as "one dimension of broad social and economic transformations, that in different forms and degrees, affected *all* of American society, and by seeing rural and urban history as distinct but linked aspects of, for example, the spread of market relations or the variegated process of industrialization" (9). Such perspectives, they believe, should be developed within a world perspective, rather than a mere national setting, and by analysis not only of market-based phenomena but of resistance to them as well. In an acknowledgment of debt to the late Herbert G. Gutman, the editors note that they share "his long-standing insistence that the history of labor form part of the larger history of capitalism in the United States, and that the history of capitalism embrace the country as well as the town and city" (xi).

Prude and Hahn have indeed edited a broad-ranging collection. The essays provided for the Northeast by Gary Kulik, Thomas Dublin, Jonathan Prude, and David Jaffee investigate controversies between